Competencies of Teachers Regarding School–Parent Relations: A Case of Antalya

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Abstract Aim of the study is to determine competence of classroom teachers and branch teachers regarding school–parent relations according to the opinions of school principals and supervisors. This study is based on a survey model. The population of this study consists of school principals who work in public primary and middle schools in the central districts of Antalya province, Turkey, together with education supervisors working in Antalya province. The school principals were chosen by cluster sampling method and supervisors were chosen by random method. In order to solve the sub-problems of the study; arithmetic mean and standard deviation were calculated and Mann Whitney U and Kruskall Walls tests were applied. In accordance with the findings of the study; the participants think that classroom teachers are more qualified and capable than branch teachers. It is recommended that in-service training programmes be organized in order to improve teachers' qualifications in school-family communication and cooperation, and that common public education programmes be organized in relation to the effects of family and society on education as a means to provide awareness for the target group.

Keywords School-parent Relations, Supervisor, School Principal, Teacher, Parents

1. Introduction

School is an institution where students acquire knowledge, skills, and learn behaviour. Schools are based within the social, cultural, economic, and political periphery, which has an important effect on the school. The qualification of this interaction depends on the extent of the communication of the school with this environment. From another perspective, schools are a system of raising humans as intellectual and social capital, because schools are fundamental institutions in the socialisation of children; teaching social values, norms, and social fidelity. The school, which is a social organisation, has a strategic importance in the socialisation of the individuals; hence, the main function of school is the socialisation and acculturation of the individuals.

The related literature also emphasises the requirement that schools should start its relationship with the social environment through the family [1]. The fundamental purposes of school-family relations may be stated as the establishment of meaningful cooperation with the family in achieving effective and efficient learning process, positively changing the viewpoint of the family concerning education, motivation of the student for learning activities, development of self-esteem of the student, acquainting students with the environment, directing student' attention to the environment, ensuring that students achieve effective integration with the environment, and protecting students from the negative effects of the environment [2]. Studies on the factors that increase success in school in the learning-teaching process demonstrate that school-family collaboration has an important effect on success in school [3]. The studies also report that participation of the families in activities such as decisions concerning the school and the planning of courses affects the students' academic success [4]. The studies also demonstrate that when families who want their children to be successful at school become more closely involved and more closely with their children's education, the children are higher achievers [1]. Involvement of the family in the child's educational activities, for example following up on school work and motivating the child to learn, is directly related to achievement in school [5]. Studies also show that parent involvement increase the child's perception of cognitive competence [6] and quality of the student–teacher relationship [3]. Family involvement increases academic success in children and young people, encourages students to be successful, and increases school attendance. Furthermore, school- family relation enhances the positive aspects of the class, increase the tendency of the students to work, and supports them in higher educational targets [7;8]. The cooperation between school and family helps the school to realize its goals. In communities where effective cooperation between school and family has been established, democratic participation and active citizenship awareness develop,

whatever the level of information and skill [9]. School-family relation in developing countries presents opinions of the people about state structuring. According to Martin and Vincet [10], school-family relations reflect citizen-state relations. Thus, within the process of cooperation with the family, it is important that teachers should assess to the family environment of the child and establish contact with responsible members of the family in order to prepare opportunities for better education of the children [11].

Teaching is a universal profession, and such as, teachers should find and apply the best and the most effective methods, taking into account of their target group and using their skills to bring about the desired behaviour change in the students [12]. In school-family communication, teachers are the key individuals and are expected to be professional in establishing communication and cooperation with the family. Therefore, the attitude and behaviour of the teacher in establishing communication with the family, the teacher's empathy communication skills are very important [13]. Teachers may use various methods to communicate with the families. They may establish communication through weekly letters, individual notes, student-created newsletters, bulletin boards, and informal notes. Another method is face-to-face communication. Teachers may organise family meetings to communicate information concerning the class and the student. House visiting can be made to those families that cannot come to the school [14]. In fact, house visiting is one of the best ways to become acquainted with the student; such visiting ensures that the teacher understands the home life and conditions of the student [15]. Although teacher-family communication is very important, teachers may have some barriers in establishing communication with the family. One of these is teacher reluctance in establishing contact with the family due to pragmatic, psychological, or cultures issues. The basic reason for such reluctance is the teacher being wary of criticism [8]. Another reason is the teacher's opinion that the families are incompetent in matter of school and education. Low socio-cultural characteristics of a family may lead the teacher to think this way [14]. On the other hand, families may also not want to have contact with the teacher, though parents are partners of teachers. Several studies show that both teachers and parents have difficulty in cooperating with each other [16]. Especially, families with a low educational level do not want to establish communication with the teacher, although the teacher may wish to do so [8]. In addition, not being able to find time to contact the teacher, escaping responsibility, and communication problems may hinder communication between the teacher and the family [17]. Besides, socio-demographic and economic circumstances, such as marital status, and child' gender are other factors in parents' engagement in their children's education [18].

Even if the development levels and the social, economic and political structure of countries are different, a high quality education can only be possible through effective school-family communication Therefore, effect of school–

parent relation has not only been suggested among researchers and but also it is taken into consideration by education policy makers [3;19]. In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education conducts studies on teacher competencies, in cooperation with universities, in order to ensure a dynamic structure in education and training. The Ministry has determined the "General Competencies of the Teaching Profession" together with academicians within the scope of the "Basic Education Support Project." The competence of the teaching profession as identified by these studies covers six main competency areas and 39 sub-competencies. The six main competencies are Personal and Professional Values – Professional Development; the Learning and Teaching Processes; Monitoring and Assessment of Learning, Development; Programme and Content Knowledge; Relations with the School, Family, and Community; and Programme and Content Knowledge. The Ministry of National Education has decided that the "General Competencies of the Teaching Profession" are to be used in defining teacher training policies, in educational faculties, within on-the-job-training of teachers, in teacher selection, in the assessment of teachers, and in self-knowledge of teachers and career development. These competencies defined by the Ministry of National Education are expected to be fulfilled both by primary school teachers and by branch teachers.

School-family relationship refers to both family responsibilities and school responsibilities for involving parents in school work [20]. But some studies in Antalya show that parents are not fulfilling their responsibilities related to participation in parents' education programmes provided by schools, involvement in school-parent association activities [21], involvement and volunteering in extra-curricular activities, and regular communication with teaching staff about their child's development [22]. There has been no study concerning the opinions of school principals and education supervisors concerning the competencies of teachers in establishing communication with families and ensuring their cooperation, although there have been studies on school-family relations. Therefore, an assessment of the competencies of primary school teachers and branch teachers may act as a guide for universities and educational managers. In addition, it is maintained that this study, in covering competencies in school-family relations, will contribute to the international literature. The study is the first concerning competencies of teachers regarding school-parent relations in Turkey. Hence, the purpose of the study is to identify the competency levels of primary school teachers and branch teachers in school and family relationships, within the general teacher competencies defined by Ministry of Education. Answers to the following questions have been sought out:

1. What are the opinions of school principals and supervisors concerning the competencies of teachers in "getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families"? Is there a significant difference between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to the variables of duty, gender,

seniority, branch, and educational status?

2. What are the opinions of the school principals and supervisors concerning the competencies of teachers in "ensuring family involvement and cooperation"? Is there a significant difference between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to the variables of duty, gender, seniority, branch, and educational status?

2. Method

The present study is a descriptive survey model applied in order to determine the competency levels of school principals, primary education supervisors, and teachers concerning school-family relations.

2.1. Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of 1.267 individuals: 1.089 school principals who work in the 607 primary and 482 secondary schools, and 178 educational supervisors in the Antalya province. To determine how many individuals should be included in the sample from such a large population, cluster sampling method was applied. The sample size was computed to be at least 310. Questionnaires were voluntarily completed by 312 school principals. Questionnaires for the supervisors were given at their monthly meetings with the Directorate of National Education, and of the 178 questionnaires issued, 127 were completed and returned.

Of the participants in the sample, 71% were school principals and 29% were supervisors, and 23% participants were female and 77% male. With respect to seniority, 57% had been working for 21 years or more, 15% for 16-20 years, 17% for 11-15 years, 10% for 6-10 years and 1% for 1-5 years. With respect to educational status, 68% were university graduates, 17% were upper secondary education graduates, and 15% had master's degree. None of the participants held a doctoral degree. Of the participants, 54% were graduates of primary school teaching departments and 46% were graduates of branch teaching departments.

2.2. Data Collection Instrument

The competencies prepared by the Ministry of National Education and in participation with academicians within the scope of the Basic Education Support Project were converted into a questionnaire and used as a data collection instrument. The first section of the questionnaire was "Personal Information," used to determine the demographic characteristics of the school principals and the supervisors within the study sample. The second section covered the questions that sought the opinions of primary school teachers and branch teachers on competencies in getting acquainted with the family, objectivity in the relations with the families, family participation, and ensuring participation. The questionnaire was prepared in accordance with a 5-point

Likert type scale, with increasing order: "1) Never, 2) Seldom, 3) Sometimes, 4) Frequently, and 5) Always". After the questionnaire was prepared, experts' opinions from various branches of educational sciences and schools in the Muratpaşa central district were sought. A pilot application to 64 school principals and 25 primary education supervisors was undertaken, and the responses were assessed using the Cronbach's α test. As a result of the analysis, the alpha value was found to be 0.88 for the first factor, and 0.93 for the second factor. The reliability coefficient for the whole scale was .92. The correlation values of the items in the first factor range between .75 and .84. The correlation values of the items in the second factor range between .73 and .80. It was observed that the reliability coefficients were high for both dimensions, and therefore that the instruments was considered as reliable.

2.3. Data Analysis

As descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation values were used in the data analysis. When compliance of the variables with normal distribution was assessed with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it was seen that the variables related to competencies in getting acquainted with the family, objectivity in the relations with the families, family participation, and ensuring that participation did not comply with normal distribution. Because the variables did not conform to normal distribution, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal Walls tests were used in the comparison of the variables of duty, gender, seniority, and branch and educational statuses of the school principals and supervisors.

3. Findings

This section covers the statistical computations to answer the sub-problems of the study, and the results found and the interpretation of these findings.

3.1. Competencies of Teachers in Getting acquainted with the Family

For the sub-competency "getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families," the opinions of school principals on primary school teaching are in the "frequently" interval ($\overline{X}$=3.76). The opinions of the primary school supervisors about primary school teachers concerning this dimension are in the "frequently" interval ($\overline{X}$=3.45). When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of primary school teachers in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relation with the families are assessed together, it can be seen that the school principals and supervisors maintain that primary school teachers frequently fulfil the competency in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families ($\overline{X}$=3.67). When the opinions of

the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of primary school teachers in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families are compared, a significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors ($U=15.276$, $p=0.00$). No significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to gender ($U=15.994$, $p=0.451$), graduating from primary school teaching or branch teaching departments ($U=22.008$, $p=0.972$), seniority ($x^2=0.827$, $p=0.935$) and educational statuses ($x^2=3,055$, $p=0,217$) of the participants.

For the sub-competency "getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families" the opinions of the school principals on branch teaching are in the "frequently" interval $\overline{X}=3.53$. The opinions of the primary school supervisors about branch teachers concerning this dimension are in the "sometimes" interval $\overline{X}=3.05$. When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of branch teachers in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families are assessed together, it can be seen that the school principals and supervisors maintain that the branch teachers sometimes fulfil the competency in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families ($\overline{X}=3.39$). When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of branch teachers in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relation with the families are compared, a significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors ($U=13.083$, $p=0.00$). No significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to gender ($U=15.414$, $p=0.217$), graduating from primary school teaching or branch teaching departments ($U=22.980$, $p=0.516$), seniority ($x^2=0.807$, $p=0.937$), and educational statuses ($x^2=2.796$, $p=0.247$) of the participants.

3.2. Competencies of Teachers in Ensuring Family Involvement and Cooperation

For the sub-competency, the opinions of the school principals on primary school teaching are in the "frequently" interval ($\overline{X}=3.71$). The opinions of the primary school supervisors about primary school teachers concerning this dimension are in the "sometimes" interval ($\overline{X}=3.33$). When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of primary school teachers in ensuring family involvement and cooperation are assessed together, it can be seen that the school principals and supervisors maintain that the primary school teachers frequently fulfil the competency in getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relation with the families ($\overline{X}=3.57$). When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of teachers in ensuring family involvement and cooperation are compared, a significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors ($U=13.750$, $p=0.00$). No significant difference

was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to gender ($U=15.847$, $p=0.376$), graduating from primary school teaching or branch teaching departments ($U=22.858$, $p=0.415$), seniority ($x^2=2.195$, $p=0.700$), and educational statuses ($x^2=2.430$, $p=0.297$) of the participants.

For the sub-competency "ensuring family involvement and cooperation," the opinions of the school principals on primary school teaching are in the "sometimes" interval ($\overline{X}=3.25$). The opinions of the primary school supervisors about branch teachers concerning dimension are in the "sometimes" interval ($\overline{X}=2.73$). When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of branch teachers in ensuring family involvement and cooperation are assessed together, it is seen that the school principals and supervisors maintain that the primary school teachers sometimes fulfil the competency in ensuring family involvement and cooperation ($\overline{X}=3.16$). When the opinions of the school principals and supervisors about the competencies of teachers in ensuring family involvement and cooperation are compared, a significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors ($U=15.068$, $p=0.00$). There is a significant difference between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to the educational statuses of the participants ($x^2=7.215$, $p=0.027$). No significant difference was observed between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors with respect to gender ($U=16.102$, $p=0.511$), graduating from primary school teaching or branch teaching departments ($U=23.891$, $p=0.972$), and seniority ($x^2=2.187$, $p=0.701$) of the participants.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to identify the competency level of primary school teachers and branch teachers in school and family relationships, which are involved in the general teacher competencies. According to the findings obtained in this study, the opinions of principals and supervisors concerning the competencies of primary school teachers in "getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relation with the families are in the "frequently" interval. Their opinions concerning the competencies of branch teachers are in the "sometimes" interval. It is thought that primary school teachers are more competent in the sub-dimension "getting acquainted with the family and objectivity in the relations with the families". There was a significant difference between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors. The opinions of the school principals are more positive on primary school teachers compared to the supervisors. As seniority increases, averages increase, and as educational statuses increase, averages decrease. Female school principals who originate from primary school teaching are more positive on this sub-competency level. School principals also consider the competencies of branch teachers more positively. In

opinions concerning the competencies of branch teachers, as seniority increases, averages increase and as educational statuses increase, averages decrease. In the sub-dimension "ensuring family involvement and cooperation," the opinions of the school principals and supervisors concerning the competencies of primary school teachers are in the "frequently" interval. Their opinions concerning the competencies of branch teachers are in the "sometimes" interval. According to these findings, the participants believe that the primary school teachers are more competent in the sub-dimension "ensuring family involvement and cooperation". There is a significant difference between the opinions of the school principals and supervisors. The opinions of the school principals on primary school teachers are more positive. As seniority increases, averages increase, and female school principal participants, who originate from primary school teaching, consider more positively on this sub-competency level. School principals also consider the competencies of branch teachers more positively. As seniority increases, averages increase, and as educational statuses increase, averages decrease. Female school principal participants who originate from branch teaching view this competency of branch teachers more positively.

In the present study on school-family relations, it was concluded that the competencies of primary school teachers are at a higher level compared to those of branch teachers. However, studies concerning the relationships of teachers with the family indicate that the teachers consider themselves to be quite competent [23; 24]. It will be better to discuss the results obtained in the study in three dimensions. One of these is the communication between supervisors and teachers. In the study, the opinions of the supervisors are found to be more negative compared to those of the principals. The causes of the supervisors' negative opinions about teachers must be the subject of a separate study. Another dimension is the work conditions of the primary school teachers and branch teachers. In Turkey, the primary school teachers work together with their students at least five hours every day. The students of primary school teachers are between 6-10 years of age. On the other hand, branch teachers can see individual students for only about 1-2 hours a week. The students of branch teachers are between 11-14 years of age.

In Turkey, it has become a tradition in some areas to take primary school students to school every morning and later to collect them from school. In particular, some mothers are in closer communication with the school since their children are younger. This closer relationship of families with the school may facilitate the task of the primary school teachers. On the other hand, the fact that the branch teachers are in the school for shorter times and witness less visits by families may negatively affect the communication of the branch teachers with families.

The third dimension is the disinterest of families in schooling in Turkey. In studies on the relationship with families, the teachers often consider families indifferently.

Especially in schools other than primary schools, opinions on the indifference of the families increase [25;26;27;28;29]. However, since the present study is within the scope of the competencies of the teacher with respect to communication with families, considering the results, it can be said that branch teachers are not competent in establishing relationships. These results may be interpreted as even if the branch teachers are competent, they do not use their competencies adequately. Another reason may be parental disillusionment regarding teachers. Parental disillusionment occurs when teachers reject attempt of some parents to involve themselves in their children's education and to get in contact with teachers [16]. Parents within the scope of the present study might meet rejectionist attitudes of teachers and therefore school principals and supervisors may think that teachers do not have the competencies regarding school-parents relations. However, several studies show that insecure teachers may be reluctant to communicate with parents [30] because of feelings incompetency or inadequacy.

The essential recommendation of the present study is that school principals should play a leadership role in ensuring the effectiveness of schools, in establishing relations with families and in ensuring family involvement (Westergård, 2013). The distributive leadership attitudes of school principals will cause the teachers to assume responsibilities and to develop themselves in order to assume responsibilities (Spillane, 2005) because a distributive leadership attitude in school is a decision process based on participation and cooperation covering principals, teachers, students and families (Heck and Hallinger, 2009). Within this context, the idea that schools should be managed based on a participatory approach has recently become an idea being advocated in various circles (Smylie, Lazarus ve Conyers, 1996). Besides, building school culture based on caring, empathy, encouragement and reinforcement by school principals help to develop the school-parent relationship (Deslandes, at al., 2015). Also in-service training of teachers to increase cooperation of teachers with families will also be beneficial. Westergård [16] determined competences of teachers regarding school-parent relationship as relational competence, communication competence and context competence. These competences of teachers can be enhanced via in-service training, as teachers act professionally when working with parents [34]. Another recommendation of the present study is emphasising the school-family cooperation in educational faculties [35]. In educational faculties, school-family cooperation is only one chapter in the class management course. No assessment has been made concerning this competency. However, it's known that the teacher training system in Turkey has many problems [36]. Therefore, school-parent communication and collaboration are only one sub-problem of the system. However, studies indicate that school-family cooperation in Turkey is known to be problematic. Hence, the cooperation of the Ministry of National Education and the educational faculties will play an important role.

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